**Regardless of election outcomes, the future of aviation is in our hands**

*By Daniel-Robert Gooch, President, Canadian Airports Council*

Every four years, we hold a federal election. Every 10 years, the government is mandated to undertake a Canada Transportation Act Review. Both of these initiatives are massive in their own ways, and in 2015 they overlapped.

Four years later, we are in the midst of another federal election, with the full impact of that Canada Transportation Review yet to be fully understood.

The Liberal government’s response to the review, which included 10 policy recommendations for aviation, was Transport 2030. If you ever wondered what was driving the new air passenger protection rules, infrastructure spending on transportation corridors or carbon fuel reduction schemes, they, plus other major initiatives affecting aviation and air travellers, started with Transport 2030.

These are well-intentioned initiatives. Who wouldn’t want to protect passengers, reduce emissions or enhance multimodal travel and international connectivity?

But theory and practice are two different things. As these complex new policies work their way through the system, it is critical that we get it right, by understanding and adapting to the real opportunities and challenges when considering major new policy changes for the sector.

Take for example, one of Transport 2030’s central policies: Air Passenger Protection Regulations. Transport Canada looked to the long-standing passenger rights regime in Europe as a model, and you can see many echoes of it reflected in Canada’s new compensation program.

Of course, aviation in Europe, with its plethora of low-cost carriers and densely populated cities, are completely different for Canada, the second largest country in the world but with just five percent of the population of Europe. Aviation necessarily plays a greater role in Canada, and it is an industry with a challenging financial model. This reality means that Canada has to be more careful and more nimble in its thinking about aviation and the industry’s future.

Fortunately, much of this work on the future is starting now. For example, across the country, airports, airlines and the Canadian and international governments are working to modernize passenger processes with new technologies like facial verification, that improve security effectiveness, innovation and service to travellers at every step of a traveller’s path to the gate.

It’s a future in which the industry makes dramatic (but not unprecedented) leaps to ensure aviation can continue to connect our planet as we transform our transportation and electrical systems to meet climate goals. We are proud of the fact that aviation and airports are on the cutting edge of fossil fuel reduction, employing new technologies and flight strategies, and adopting the ICAO-led Carbon Offset Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA). Airports are playing their part as well.

Airport around the world, including 16 in Canada, have enacted carbon use reduction schemes under the Airport Carbon Accreditation program.

The future of air transport also means making changes on the ground. In many communities, getting to and from the airport is as big a concern for the airport as on-airport infrastructure. In major cities, this includes transformation of regional transportation infrastructure with more investments in regional rail and transit in partnerships across all levels of government.

For example, airport rail projects are underway in Montreal, Ottawa and southern Ontario -- where are passengers are expected to grow by 60 million passengers in the next 30 years and Toronto Pearson’s multimodal transit hub is being designed to support the flow of these travellers beyond the airport and into the city and region beyond.

It is important that the next federal government continue to work with provincial and municipal counterparts to fund transit and regional rail around airport employment zones to improve the flow of travellers and goods by taking vehicles off roads and more travellers and workers onto cleaner transportation options. It’s the right move for the environment, for travellers, airport workers and for regional economic opportunity.

The federal government’s responsibility to support transportation infrastructure extends to Canada’s small airports. Large airports have the ability to fund their own infrastructure through user fees, which have allowed them to invest some $27 billion since 1992 without taxpayer support. Smaller airports do not have the revenue streams for needed upgrades and improvements. While the federal Airport Capital Assistance Program (ACAP) was created to fund these projects, funding is stagnant and needs to be increased from its current limit of $38.5 million a year.

No matter who forms the next government, Canada remains Canada – a country of people who both need air access and love to travel and whose economic opportunity is inexorably linked to our ability to reach domestic and international markets.

Industry and the government of Canada are on the same side: we all want a safe, accessible and sustainable air transport sector that is made-in-Canada yet a showcase for the world. Working together, that can be our future.